

## **Visitor Diversity on National Forests— How Should Managers Respond?**

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Historically, Anglo Americans have been the primary clientele at nature-based outdoor recreation areas in the United States (Chavez 2001, Dunn et al. 2002). Goldsmith (1994) highlighted the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among National Park visitors. Citing a Texas A&M study, Goldsmith (1994) reported that less than 1% of car visitors to Yosemite National Park were African American and less than 4% of bus riders to the park were African American. Visitation by Hispanics at Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona was similar to that for Blacks. Natural resource managers and policy makers also have been mostly Anglo. Not surprisingly, the resulting management "culture" has privileged traditional natural resource values and beliefs rooted in White, middle American culture (Deluca 1999, Chavez 2001).

The relative lack of natural resource use among minorities is not unique to the National Park System. Similar results have been found for recreation visitors to national forests. The U.S. Forest Service's inventory of national forest visitors (National Visitor Use Monitoring Survey [NVUM]) shows that the majority of visits (92.7%) to most national forests were made by Whites in 2004<sup>3</sup> (English et al. 2002, National Visitor Use Report 2004). However, these figures vary somewhat for forests located in the Pacific Southwest and Southwest regions of the country (California,

Arizona, New Mexico), especially for urban forests adjacent to Los Angeles, California. In 2004, roughly one-quarter of all visits to the Los Padres National Forest were made by Hispanics, and close to one-fifth of visits to the San Bernardino National Forest were accounted for by Hispanics (NVUM 2004).

The relatively high percentage of visits made by Hispanics appears to reflect the large numbers of Hispanics in southern California. Hispanics make up about one-third of California's population and close to one-half (47%) of the Los Angeles County population. These numbers are consistent with the opportunity and demographic explanations of racial and ethnic differences in outdoor recreation participation (Huchison 1987, Lindsey and Ogle 1972). According to these theories, minorities are expected to visit outdoor areas or participate in activities in proportion to their presence in a given population near natural resources.

Hispanics are also showing up in greater numbers on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest in Georgia. Again, these increases appear to be linked to demographic changes. The Hispanic population in Georgia increased from 1.6% in 1990 to 5.3% in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1990, 2004a). The increase was especially noticeable in several north Georgia counties adjacent to the forest. Although visits made by Hispanics are still relatively low (3%), forest

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<sup>3</sup> The exception is visits to the Caribbean National Forest in Puerto Rico where 58.8% of visits were made by Hispanics in 2004.

managers note the growing number of Hispanics, and that their recreation style differs from that of traditional Anglo visitors.

With respect to Asian American visitation, the NVUM also found that the proportion of visits accounted for by Asians on forests in the Southwest and Northwest appears to reflect the Asian presence in the Pacific population (California and Washington). Nine percent of visits to the Cleveland National Forest in southern California were made by individuals of Asian-origin in 2004. Close to 6% of visits to the Wenatchee National Forest (Washington) were made by Asians (NVUM 2004). Asians have higher than national average percentages in both California (10.9%) and Washington state (5.5%).

Demographic changes along culture and ethnic lines are causing managers to reconsider the way they manage natural resources and the types of amenities they offer recreation visitors (Chavez 2002). Past research shows both Hispanic and Asian outdoor recreation differs from Anglo behavior; Hispanics and Asians tend to emphasize collective, family-oriented activities. This contrasts with traditional Anglo recreation involving more individualistic, dispersed activities (Dwyer 1994, Irwin et al. 1990). Also, Hispanics typically recreate in larger groups than Whites. Some national forest managers in southern California have responded to the Hispanic presence by adopting a grassroots "adaptive management" style that incorporates the opinions and preferences of nontraditional cultural groups (Chavez 2002).

To respond to nontraditional visitors, managers need the same kinds of information they would obtain from traditional user groups—for instance, who the visitors are—age, gender, group size, and place of origin. In addition, managers need to know what these visitors do when they visit—what kinds of activities and site amenities are preferred. Another important piece of information is knowing how to effectively communicate

with groups whose first language is not English—for instance, what bilingual publications or signage is needed or when should bilingual staff be hired? These are very straightforward prescriptions that have been in place for a number of years in the Southwest, as indicated by Chavez's (2001, 2002) research on Hispanic recreationists.

### Minorities Who Do Not Visit

Less information exists on racial and ethnic groups that make relatively little use of the national forests, for instance African Americans. Much has been written about the relative lack of African American participation in forest-based outdoor recreation activities (other than fishing) (Floyd 1998, Floyd 1999, Washburne 1978). NVUM results concerning Black visits to national forests are consistent with prior findings. According to the data, Blacks account for only 0.7% of visits to national forests across the country, yet African Americans represent more than 12% of the U.S. population. Particularly striking are the low visitation percentages for Blacks in the South, a region where Blacks are more highly concentrated. Roughly 30% of the population in six southern states—Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina—are African American (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2004b). These numbers are even higher in specific sub-regions such as the Atlanta metropolitan area and the rural "Black Belt" which stretches from Virginia to East Texas.

The African American population in the South is similar to the Hispanic population in the Southwest in that both groups have comparatively high populations in their respective regions, and these populations are close to national forests. Still, African Americans contribute no more than 5% of the visits to any national forest across the South (NVUM 2004).

An obvious consideration for forest managers in the South is how to more effectively engage African

Americans in forest-based outdoor recreation. This could involve a regional assessment of African American outdoor recreation interests and constraints and comparing those with recreation offerings on the national forests. This could also involve determining the amount of forested land owned by African Americans, as private land ownership may contribute to differences between Hispanic visits in the Southwest and Black visits in the South. If a higher proportion of Black southerners own forested land, compared to Hispanics in the West, it may be that Blacks are recreating on privately held land rather than on public lands. Also, understanding the meaning that Blacks attribute to wildlands may be instrumental in deciphering differences between Black and Hispanic use of national forests. For instance, Johnson and Bowker (2004) maintain that Blacks may have developed an aversion to wildlands because of past associations with slavery, plantation agriculture, lynching, and harsh working conditions in the southern forest industry. Along similar lines, Martin (2004) maintains that many contemporary Blacks engage less with "the Great Outdoors" because they identify more with a sophisticated urban, cosmopolitanism than with rural nature because the former represents for Blacks achievement and success in American life.

Irrespective of past or present constraints, the Forest Service is directed by Executive Order 12898 to identify differential consumption of natural resources by minorities and low income populations. This includes addressing the issue of low Black representation on national forests. But most importantly, this task involves differentiating between those conditions or constraints internal to Black culture which may inhibit outdoor recreation, such as lack of interest, and those external to culture, such as lack of transportation or information about available resources.

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## **Abstract**

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Given increasing need and decreasing capacity, the Forest Service outdoor recreation research program must strategize how best to address current and future priorities. The papers compiled here were presented at the National Workshop on Recreation Research and Management held in Portland, Oregon, February 8-10, 2005. Papers are organized around four themes: Understanding Forest Recreation Visitors, Recreation Planning & Monitoring, Recreation Management, and Special Issues in Recreation.

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